

ASL1: Fighting Withdrawal

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Rating: 60/40 Pro Soviet [Under ABS: 50/50]

Attraction:

What we have here is a situation most commanders will find themselves facing at least once in their careers. Can the Soviet player successfully mount a withdrawal to safety with anything vaguely resembling a coherent military force or will the crack Finnish troops cut him off from his route to safe haven. This is a game of constant maneuver and an ever-fluid situation, there is neither time nor the opportunity for a Point Defence here.

Soviet Advantages: SAN, Commissar, HIP

As most players soon realise after several games in command of or against pre-11/42 Soviet troops, the Commissar may be the the most important onboard infantry asset a Soviet player may possess.

In this scenario the primary requirement for the Soviet player is to rally his broken squads as fast as humanly possible, and the Commissar is admirably suited to accomplish this as no other European SMC can do.

Optimally the Commissar must be kept away from Finnish LOS. Failing that, he should be kept concealed at the least, for if the commissar is out of action for even a single turn, the position of the Soviet force can deteriorate past the point of no return. Whereas, a healthy commissar will at least maintain the Soviet retreat in some form of discipline.

The two hidden units allows the Soviet player to protect the routing/retreating troops, and they can also serve as a final defensive line should the Finn succeed in an early catastrophic breakthrough, and subsequent exploitation beyond the initial defensive screen. However these two HIP units should not be relied upon to shoulder the entire burden of defence, but instead they should serve as focal points of successive defensive lines.

The Soviet Sniper can be a major positive factor in the Soviet defence, as it will force the Finnish Commander to pass up many of the 6 FP @ +3 shots that can keep the Soviet Broken units out of action due to DM and/or Disruption. A further positive is the debilitating effect a wounded Finnish leader will have on the Finnish movement capability. For, in this scenario, the Finnish leaders are no more than drovers and any lessening of this capability will only deepen the Finnish player's desperation as the pressure of time mounts.

Soviet Disadvantages: Ammo shortage, ELR, Set-up restrictions

For any side afflicted by Ammunition Shortage, there is but one major rule: hold your fire until you can see the whites of their eyes! Firing at any Finnish unit without a final DRM of -1 or better is not conducive to the survival of Soviet squads as effective units. Remember, a squad that rolls a IFT DR of 12 will be replaced by a 426 Conscript [Yuck!], with all the

attendant disadvantages to movement, fire control and especially Ambush and Close Combat. In the case of SWs, extreme care is needed in selection of worthwhile eligible targets.

The restriction on the Soviet deployment is self-evident, but failure to take account of the Finnish flanking potential will lead to the majority of the Soviet force being bypassed or surrounded and cut off from retreat paths.

The low nature of the Soviet ELR makes the Soviet troops especially vulnerable to any Morale Check, which tends to suggest that Finnish fire in the AdFPh is effective beyond the raw numbers.

Soviet Defense:

The first task of the Soviet troops is to prevent or otherwise negate any deep penetration into the Soviet rear. Use the two HIP squads to cover your withdrawal to a better situated defensive line. The Soviet commander should set-up his troops so he can voluntarily break and leapfrog past the back-up positions. While delaying the Finn is the key to winning this scenario, under no circumstances should the Soviet player hold a position for too long. By giving up ground in the Soviet MPH, The Soviet player will make the Finnish commander exceptionally wary of indiscriminate movement.

When moving the Commissar, the Soviet player must make sure that routing troops can actually reach his location, and that the projected rally point is out of Finnish LoS for the Finnish AdvFire and DefFire phases.

At all costs avoid close combat except in the end-game, as the Finns are likely to successfully ambush more often than not, especially against Conscripts, and a successful ambush/CC will lead to the ambushing unit making a forward advance after Close Combat.

The unwieldy nature of the MMG means that the Soviets are unlikely to get a chance to move it at all without seriously compromising the defence. To this end a position that takes advantage of its range factor [ie: in the rear!] is almost de rigeur for that SW.

With these thoughts in mind, here is a set-up that we believe reflects the points made above:

D5h1: 447 [HIP] K4h2: 8-1,447/mmg [HIP] W1: 447 X2: 9-0 Com Y10: 7-0, 447/lmg, 447/lmg, 447, [?] Z5: 447 [?] Z8: 447 [?] AA2: 447 [?] AA3: 447 [?] AA4: 447 [?]

AA6: 447 [?] AA7: 447 [?] AA8: 447 [?]

Note that while the Commissar starts unconcealed he gains concealment through being out of LOS.

Finnish Advantages: Morale, Firepower, Assault Fire, Self-Rally, Stealth

As can be seen from the list above, the Finnish squads are very potent and can inflict as much punishment as they receive. These qualities allow the Finnish player to be very bold as he must be if he wishes to have any chance of winning.

The Finnish player must advance into close combat where at all possible, unless outnumbered in squads or CXed. If, however, the opportunity to close combat Soviet Conscripts arises, the chance must be taken given the -1 DRM for capture attempts. The self-rally capability allows the luxury of voluntary breaking in order to gain vital ground towards the exit edge almost with impunity.

The Stealthy nature of the Finns will help in no small measure in Ambush situations especially against those highly vulnerable Soviet Conscripts.

Finnish Disadvantages: Time, Victory Conditions

The Finnish commander faces two major disadvantages which are closely linked. The Finn must traverse the entire length of Board 21 while facing a similar number of enemy squads, yet have only 7 Game turns in which to accomplish this.

The initial Victory Point count is 35 Finnish potential Exit-VPs against 32 Soviet, so the Finnish player should look to take as many prisoners as possible with the view of exiting them for further Vps. The Finnish player must constantly be on the move with his troops and be prepared to take risks in order to negate these two handicaps.

Finnish Attack:

Take a long look at Board 21. Work out the the quickest route in MFs that would leave a squad protected by any TEM. Ah yes, you have seen it. Due to the presence of that long wall on the eastern flank, the Finnish player will find this the easiest area to exploit to his advantage.

The Finnish player must be as aggressive as possible in his actions. Don't be afraid to move in the open, but try to avoid moving adjacent unless moving in cover, or with the benefit of positive DRM such as smoke, terrain or notably CX-fire.

The main thrust of the Finnish commander's battleplan should be to outflank the Soviet initial front-line, and to pin the Soviets in position with a reasonable number of squads. Use a Flank group of 6 to 8 squads [4 of which should deploy once behind the Soviet MLR] to obtain the necessary Victory points and to flush out the two HIP units. Don't stack unless you really are desperate for speed in your advance or to limit the effect of any residual fire that may potentially block further MPh options.

The Finnish player should only fire reasonable attacks [4FP @ +2 or better] that will have a reasonable chance of a result, as antagonising the Soviet Sniper unnecessarily is not recommended. Only the forces needed to pin the Soviets should ever Prep Fire, as the maneuver groups will almost certainly be unable to exit the board if they prep fire even once.

Assault Fire is the Finnish friend here, allowing the Finn to maintain an advance while still matching the Soviet Firepower. The MMG should remain dismantled as the extra mobility for CX troops is worth the slight firepower decrease, and CX movement will be occurring as often as possible.

The Finnish set-up given below is designed to utilise the strategies outlined so far:

CC5: 648, 648

CC6: 648, 648

CC7: 648, 648

CC8: 648/lmg, 648/lmg

CC9: 648, 648, 648, 8-0

CC10: 648, 648/lmg, 648/mmg(dm), 9-0

DD8: 648, 648, 8-0

Conclusion:

The Soviets, buying time to slow the Finnish onslaught, will pay a heavy price for each minute's delay. The Soviets know that the enemy must not breakthrough, for should this occur, the war will be over for the 151st Border Battalion.

The rating for this scenario starts at 60/40 in favour of the Soviet player, primarily because of the tough Finnish VC and Time constraints. If played over 8 turns, the balance would be 55/45 Pro-Soviet, therefore the ideal scenario length would seem to be 9 turns and Soviet balance.

Not one of our favourite Beyond Valor contests, mainly through over-familiarity, the lack of options available to both players, and the skewed nature of the VC. It is hard to see why this scenario is so popular at tournaments over the years.